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## HYDROTHORAX,

IN WHICH IS RELATED

The Drigin of the Disease,

And Progress of Cure,

FROM THE MOST HOPELESS STATE TO A RETURN TO HEALTH:

With some Observations

ON

HYDRARGYRI SUB MURIAS,

#### BY W. WHINCOPP, M.D.

#### Woodbridge:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. LODER; AND BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND JOY, LONDON.

1822.

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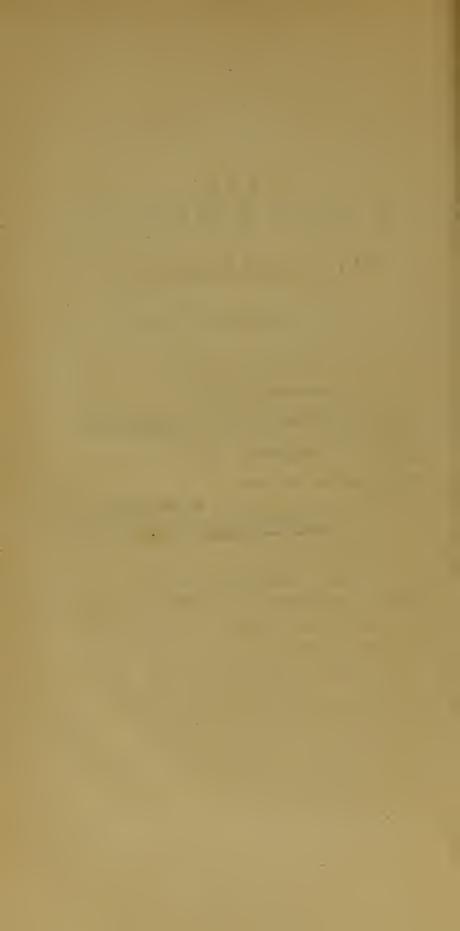
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THERE ARE TRUTHS WHICH, AS THEY ARE
ALWAYS NECESSARY, DO NOT GROW
STALE BY REPETITION.

Dr. Sam. Johnson.



#### CASE

OF

### HYDROTHORAX.



The employment of digitalis in the cure of dropsies is by no means new, for so early as the year 1775, the late Dr. Withering made trial of it in these diseases; but, previously to that time, even for a century, it has stood in the list of the materia medica. Dr. Withering informs us he was induced to make trial of it, in consequence of its being employed as a popular remedy in dropsy. His success was so striking, in many severe cases, that, in 1786, he published his valuable treatise on the singular properties of this plant.

Since that period the opinions of our most able men have confirmed Dr. Withering's observations, which have been given to the world in a great number of useful publications; it is not, therefore, my intention to write a history and essay on the properties

of this valuable plant, as what I could say, would add nothing to a subject which has already been so ably investigated by many of our most scientific practitioners.

I propose, therefore, simply to recite the progress and particulars of a case of dropsy, which, at most, can only add one other to the many apparently hopeless cases cured by digitalis. The subject of this memoir was from previous organic disease, consequent general broken constitution, and by the too liberal use of the diffusible stimuli, brought to such a state of indirect debility, superadded to this, a profuse hæmorrage had yet further weakened the already declining powers of life, and he had arrived at an age so far advanced as could only afford the most unfavourable prognosis.

But to give a history of the case, and afford my medical reader an opportunity of forming his own conclusions, I shall proceed, without further preface, to recite as many of the particulars as my scanty notes will afford me; for it was not until some of the most favourable symptoms of amendment became apparent, and the interest many persons evinced in this neighbourhood,

that it occurred to me such a case ought to be made public.

Edward Harsant, aged sixty-three, a carpenter, an ingenious and clever mechanic, when young of a robust constitution, had been for many years a hard working, and, I may add, a hard drinking man. It often happened, by his intemperance, the digestive organs having been much impaired; the liver imperfectly performed its office, the bile frequently defective in quantity or quality, or both; his lower extremities redematous. On these occasions the stomach and liver had been so far restored to the performance of those functions, by a short abstinence from his usual potations, and the aid of medicine, as to bring him to that state of convalescence that he could return to his usual occupation, but with diminished activity, as the ædematous legs, still exhibited a languor in the absorbent system: and for ten or twelve years I have remarked his legs have been double their natural size; he says, "it is longer since they began to swell;" but a certain energy of mind had kept him to his business, without any

long or serious confinement, until January, 1821; when the liver took on as much active inflammation as is usually seen in that organ, through which the circulation is so peculiar; which under the judicious care and attention of Mr. G. Lynn, of Woodbridge, was subdued, but not till after exciting a complete ptyalism, which lasted three weeks; after a confinement of two months more, he began again to attend to his usual occupation; but his legs still remained equally ædematous, and he also felt an unusual shortness of breath, which gradually increased, but still he attended to his business, although with inconvenience, until the October, when a fall from a ladder again confined him; before he had recovered from the accident, in the middle of November, without any apparent exciting cause, a violent hæmorrhage began at the nose, and before he could procure any medical assistance, which certainly could not exceed an hour and half, he had lost several pounds of blood, for it literally ran with a stream; notwithstanding all the popular remedies had been applied, when I saw him, aided

by a syncope, the bleeding was soon restrained; it has not since returned to any amount, more than a few drops, as a dossil of lint dipped in a solution of allum has immediately stopped it; but from that time the dyspnoea rapidly increased, and on the 28th of November, 1821, he requested I would speak to him, as he could not lie down on his bed, nor walk up stairs, but with the greatest difficulty: feeling often as if he should be suffocated, starting from his sleep; there was also a slight numbness in the right arm; pulse intermitting every second or third vibration, from fifty to sixty in a minute; turbid and scanty urine: in this stage of the disease, conjecturing perhaps some of these symptoms might be partly caused by crude aliment, the intestinal canal wanting the necessary stimulus of a proper quantity and quality of bile, I gave him hydrargyri sub murias grana sex estractum glycyrrhiza q.s. fiat pilula. In this place, I have to observe, that I have been these last sixteen years in the habit of giving the hydrargy: sub murias, in an insulated form, and was never disappointed in its salutary effects of dislodging from the intestinal canal any scybula or irritating fomes, which the calomel, when conjoined with any other cathartic, too frequently fails of effecting; all the other laxatives and cathartics act by stimulating more or less the extremities of the exhalant vessels; or the excretories of the mucus follicles; hence are produced watery evacuations only, and the fomes or scybula are left—whereas calomel per se increases the peristaltic action of the moving fibres.

In many cases of diarrhœa, with distressing tenesmus, the calomel perse has succeeded with my patients afterall other means have failed. I am aware Mr. Abernethy recommends calomel in a similar way in many cases even where the irritating cause did not seem to be in the intestinal canal; but long before I saw his luminous essay, I had constantly been accustomed to give it in this way. The effects forcibly struck me seventeen years since, when my two little girls, the one two years of age, the other a year old, were ill with typhus gravior, with scarcely a hope of recovery; when the late much-lamented Dr. Wm. Hamilton, of Ipswich, visited them, and enquiring into the state of their bowels, I told him they had been relieved by a common cathartic, notwithstanding he recommended they should have directly six grains of calomel in honey, and no other cathartic; when, so soon as what had been irritating was removed by the calomel, they both began to amend; this, of course, made a strong impression on my mind, and since that time I have employed calomel in that way: but its violent effects, in some few instances, have prevented many persons giving it, except in small doses added to a carthartic: this effect, at first, I apprehended might arise from an adulterated or improperly prepared medicine; and, more particularly, if after being made into pills with any of the acid conserves, they are kept for any length of time; as it is the property of sugar, combined with an acid, to dilequesce: the mass or pills combine with a yet larger portion of oxygen, and thus the calomel may be rendered more active: but experiencing this effect in scarcely any case with children, I was convinced it must arise from a carbonaceous acid, in the prima via, further

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benkeye. I was indeped to try the digitals : but with a pube between 50 and 60. I dreadal mai might be the communitie of bringing them and loner; but the experration are some as more to clicate polymorphism than service by sine, and was who well proved - but other tympun milleur exemple, le of organic, Sir Dr. Wallering remark, " they although interest of the analysis are axed. Text-किये अर देवस्थाने एक वे के पुरावास our new fare-rable to procueing the foll Higgs of digitals, and that it periods of a least the first constitute, and mich ren on the grill legacity ader drover, e when cutteded: Term to The was seen a contribution to go of paragrown, man mit and policy the courterapor fall and the was cold, the divised of power of the plant were exceptioned: also by est in strain to confirm a this fage as far a militer a title and antiarca; be with ny pert in hazof mor digitalis exceed to the optimile state of the in tem. In terms partly last, it is the lare as Line of printer state of the material these en led an unermilling bull not remisely!

pulse; however, I began with ten drops of the tincture twice every day; on the third day it had a most powerful diuretic effect; for although he had taken no more liquid than usual, he made several gallons of urine during the night; in fact he said, he should have slept soundly the whole night but was so frequently obliged to get out of bed to empty the bladder; as it was, he had more sleep than he had had for several nights previously: his pulse was more regular. The digitalis was continued two days longer; he could now lie down in bed, and had good nights.

Fearful of pushing this powerful medicine too far, and bringing on that alarming train of symptoms, consequent to its too liberal use, anxiety at the heart, fainting, giddiness, &c. and hoping my end was, at least, partly gained, I discontinued the digitalis: my patient continued going on tolerably well for another fortnight; still there was water in the chest; the pulse intermitting; he was unable to lie down in bed; numbness in the right arm; starting occasionally from sleep; indeed he became gradually worse: calling upon him on

Christmas day I found the arm, which before was only a little benumbed, now become paralytic; the tongue and organs of speech were so much affected, that with much difficulty I understood him; I apprehended the same watery effusion had now also taken place on the brain: he was extremely enfeebled, and did not for several nights obtain any sleep; neither did he attempt going to bed, as he felt as if he should be instantly suffocated in any other than an upright posture; he, therefore, sat up in his chair, and got little or no sleep; his pulse intermitting every second or third pulsation; and entertaining no hopes of his recovery, on the night of the 30th, I was requested to visit him, and in the full expectation it would be the last time I should see him alive; but during the absence of his messenger he had taken some spt: æther: vitriol: compos: which I had left him; and by which means he had been a little relieved: but the alvine excretion requiring prior attention, as the alvus adstricta et lutosa, indicated a very imperfectly secreted bile; I had again, therefore, recourse to the calomel, which relieved the paralysis

of the tongue; the arm now was only numb not palsied; and the next day I repeated the digitalis, increasing it one drop at each dose twice a day, to twenty drops, with the same diuretic effects; and continued it till the 21st of February, when all the symptoms of hydrothorax completely subsided; his pulse regular, between sixty and seventy in a minute; he could lay his head as low in bed as ever; he slept soundly all night, and could get up stairs without stopping; could walk a mile without any ineonvenience, excepting weakness; and, what is yet more extraordinary, his legs, which for many years had been anasarcous and very much enlarged, were certainly much less than he could remember them at any time during a very long period; in fact, they were as nearly reduced to their natural size as could be expected from the skin being so long kept in that tense and enlarged state. A striking effect also of the digitalis in this ease, was not lessening the frequency of the pulse, whilst the full diuretie effects were in complete action; I can only account for this by its restoring an intermitting to a regular pulsation, which

it completely did so soon as the water was removed from the chest. The length of time my patient was obliged to continue the digitalis had very much impaired his appetite, and of course the whole system was in a debilitated state; I therefore gave him half a grain of sulphate of iron twice a-day, in a wine glass full of very weak English gin and water. The dose of sulphate of iron may appear small to those in the habit of giving it in full quantity; but I have always found more beneficial effects in cases of simple debility, from small doses much diluted: in my opinion the good effects of our mineral chalybeate springs arise in a great measure from the small and diluted doses; the strongest chalybeate spring (Hartfell) containing but little more than four grains in the pint. Cheltenham, which is held in such high estimation, contains little more than half a grain in the pint; many much less. The benefit to my patient was soon very apparent in a rapid restoration to appetite and strength, so that in a few weeks he was able to walk two or three miles with ease; indeed he might have been considered

well, had he not imprudently gone abroad one very cold windy day in March, which brought on catarrh.

April 20th, my patient was able to work at his business, his legs, from the exertion, swelled a little: again I had recourse to digitalis; in two days the diuretic effect followed as before, breathing freely, excepting the effects of a slight catarrh; appetite good; he continued to work at his business; experienced no other inconvenience except return of ædema in the lower extremities; this I was not at all surprised at, as his lower extremities had been so many years anasarcous; his legs also disposed to ulcerate; neither was this by any means new, as they had been for a long time subject to ulceration, although the ulceration had never been very extensive.

As no kind of dropsy is so liable to return as hydrothorax, so in the present case symptoms of relapse begar to appear in the early part of May; the urine scanty and turbid, and lassitude upon the least exertion, although it could be scarcely said to be dyspnæa; he could walk up stairs and lie in bed with little or no

inconvenience; his sleep was also uninterrupted: the lassitude, I considered, was now more the effects of general debility than any positive symptom of water in the chest. I however again directed my patient to repeat the digitalis, when his urine began to be plentiful and clear; but during my absence of a few days he had increased the dose to forty drops, which had produced anxiety about the region of the heart, debility and loss of appetite. I ordered him to discontinue that medicine, and gave the sulphate of iron, now increased to a grain and half. In a few days his bodily strength was so far amended, that he was able to work a little at his business, the general anasarcous appearance was subsiding. I perceived in this relapse and repetition of the digitalis, how cautious we ought to be of an over dose, and also the necessity of watching the patient whilst taking this active medicine; and that a large dose is wholly unnecessary, as I have found from subsequent experience: for desirous of guarding against a return of the complaint, I have warned him, so soon as the urine became muddy and scanty, to take

the digitalis as phate of iron. of the tinctur diuretic effect taken. And error I had o the digitalis stage of the knowledged 1 at the same t two been com could not have the diuretic er tributed: as 11 was taking th least ands irco the chest. In ere . I have. beneficial effe sent case the evidently the with steel, th the conseque health as a n paired digestr could expect. usual, and we



